SOUL WINNING

The Greatest Privilege in the World

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Rev. William C. White, D. D.

By

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By A. L. PHILLIPS

A genuine Christian is the most God-like being on earth. To produce a Christian is the greatest privilege in the world. Christ-likeness does not consist chiefly in the absence of certain traits of character and certain activities, but has mainly to do with what a person is and does. It is a serious error to put principle over against service. A Christian reaches up to God and out towards his fellowmen. It is of the utmost importance to keep both of these elements in full and constant view. A Christian is like Christ and works like Christ. The most distinctive act of Christ when on earth was the salvation of men and women from sin. It is his distinctive work in glory. True: He was a social reformer, but his plan is to save society by saving individual men and women. He begins with their souls, but ends with the redemption of the whole man. Here, then, is the Christian's supreme duty and most exalted privilege. It is to win men to the acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord and to introduce them into his service. Whatever of Bible study and teaching, of prayer, of missionary work, of social service a man may do, if he leave undone the winning of souls to Christ he has failed to do the most distinctive work of a Christian, to enter into the enjoyment of this supreme privilege. The recognition of this great trust needs to be burned into our very souls.

DESTROYS SIN

The first cause of the disorder, misery and shame in this world is sin. This it is that makes men hate

and abuse one another. In it is the root of all social strife. Here is the cause of domestic confusion. We need search no further to discover the source of industrial injustice. Sin explains international jealousies and leads armies to destroy one another. The misery that everywhere binds men's hearts in bitterness or pain can be traced straight back to sin. All the shame of earth flows from the fountain of sin. Saving a man from sin means transforming his very nature, cleansing away his guilt and setting him free. According to S. H. Hadley's own repeated confession, he was, before his conversion, a hopeless drunkard, had been guilty of serious crime, and was living a life of unutterable misery and shame. By his conversion his sin was washed away, he became sober, and in the Water Street Mission in New York led hundreds of wretched men to a better life.

INCREASES GOODNESS

Saving men increases the amount of goodness on the earth. Whatever men's personal relation to goodness may be, they are willing that it shall be increased. Most of the great fraternal orders are trying to make men better. Our reform schools are founded on the hope that they may make more goodness. The enormous gifts of a few men who do not profess to be Christians are made with the evident desire to make goodness universal. All stable and free government rests on morality, on goodness. The one guarantee that goodness will increase is the salvation of men and women and children from sin, which is the cause of all wickedness. Cut up the root, and the stalk will wither. Plant the principle of right thinking, right feeling, right doing in the hearts of men, and the fruits of goodness will hang heavy and luscious on every side.

From the time of the conversion of William Carey, the first great missionary to India, he communicated goodness in every direction. His entrance to India was the release of powers of goodness that have spread over the whole Empire, bringing new life and healing and comfort and hope and Christian fellowship to millions of people.

ADDS TO CONSTRUCTIVE FORCES IN SOCIETY

Strong men despise a program that simply encourages tolerance for the things that exist. Acquiescence in the present conditions of humanity is no guarantee of betterment in any direction. Neither has this age any patience with men who are seeking to destroy our whole social order in the family, in the State, in the church. Acquiescence is only another way of spelling torpidity, and nihilism springs from a hotbed of diseased brain, heart and conscience. A spiritually new-born soul has in it all the possibilities of individual and social construction. Soul-winning is the most essentially constructive employment known to men on earth. It makes for good character, and that produces noble citizenship, and that makes strong and firm and free government.

The contribution made to good government by the late William Booth, Commander-in-Chief of the Salvation Army, cannot be fully estimated. His conversion brought all his tremendous executive powers under the control of Christian principles. From him there streamed to all quarters of the globe mighty spiritual energies which helped to save the worst of men and make them builders of human welfare.

CREATES HAPPINESS

There goes a man homeward at the week's end. His wavering footsteps tell the tale of his drunkenness. He enters his home with noise and cursing. His weary wife shrinks back in terror from his brutal words, while his innocent children hide from his presence. There can be no happiness there. His sin spreads misery through his home like water poured out. His own shame cannot break the chains himself has forged. The entreaties of his wife, the cries of his children cannot change him. Sermons and prayer meetings and warnings from friends and fraternity may leave him in the depths of misery. But Jesus Christ lays hold upon him through the instructions and persuasions of a

friend. A radical change takes place. His old heart of stone has melted within him, his consuming thirst has been quenched with the water of life. His manner is gentle, his speech is tender, his whole life is changed through and through. Is it not worth one's while to help produce such happiness and peace? The winner of souls makes happiness abound.

HONORS GOD

Back of all human spiritual endeavor stands God. The giving of a new nature is a direct creative act. God alone can create. It has pleased Him to give to His sons and daughters the authority to testify to His name and by His power to effect a change in men's lives. Is it not our Father's longing that sin shall cease, that goodness shall cover the earth, that men shall build free States based on righteousness, that happiness shall pervade the eager hearts of men? He wants men and women of like mind and character and activity with Himself. All His works in nature are a grand appeal to men to enter into His fellowship. All the intricate paths that men tread are laid out and guarded by Him and lead to Him. The instructions, warnings, persuasions of His word are expressions of His yearnings for the obedience of men. In the person of Jesus Christ He came to display His character, make known His power and declare His will. The death of Jesus Christ on the cross was the final proof of God's love for men. What higher honor, then, can we bring to God than a glad, free entrance into co-operation with Him in saving souls? Jesus had the "greatest aim in the world"—to be always doing the will of his Father in heaven. It is not the will of God that men shall sink into midnight under the weight of sin. He wishes them to believe, to repent and to live. Come into His purpose; enter into the fellowship of His labors in saving men.

HOW SHALL WE SAVE MEN?

By Preaching

The minister's responsibility to win souls has not diminished an iota since he was first divinely com-

missioned by Jesus Christ. The gospel is still the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes. God has not altered His purpose that a sermon should be charged with saving power. The varied and often conflicting claims made under modern conditions upon the time and energies of the minister must not be allowed to absorb from the sermon its power to save from sin. Saints must be edified and the organized activities of the church must be explained and commended, but the great emphasis must be where our Lord himself and all the noble army of effective preachers have put it—that "God commendeth His love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Never in the history of the world was there a greater need than exists today for the most positive and unflinching exposure of the nature of sin and its inevitable ruinous results on society and on the individual. Persuasive appeals to men's hearts must be joined to imperious demands upon their consciences. This age will not be impatient of such convincing arguments, such direct demands on the conscience and such irresistible wooings of men's hearts as were used by the Holy Spirit through Whitefield, Finney, Baker and Moody during the last century to save thousands of men.

By Letter-Writing

The readiness with which we yield ourselves to the influence of a personal letter is a matter of daily experience. Love and expectancy wait on the postman's arrival. How eagerly we look for the familiar hand-writing. "Here's a letter from mother," you exclaim, and you note with a pang the wobbly letters that mark the progress of age. You read every word and yield yourself to its softening entreaties as a hurt child to healing ointment. Maybe it is from your lover. You hungrily devour the whole, exclamations, protests, interrogations, diminutives, superlatives—all. Do you not remember? Well, then, why shall we not make large use of letter-writing as a method of winning souls? Anniversaries, such as birthdays and wedding days,

Christmas, Easter, New Year's Day may be used with hope of rich results. A special letter aside from any anniversary may be made the vehicle of saving grace. Henry Clay Trumbull, one of America's greatest religious editors, was won to Jesus Christ by a letter from a friend who himself was awakened to new spiritual activity by a gracious revival in his town.

By Prayerful Use of Tracts

Many instances are on record testifying to the power of tracts to win men's souls. Literally millions of them are printed and circulated each year. They have been written from almost every conceivable standpoint and make their appeals to every human motive. Selected with care and given out with prayer, they become convincing witnesses to the Gospel's saving power. Hudson Taylor, that mighty apostle to China, was looking for something to read one day before his conversion. In turning the pages of a tract that he picked up, his eyes fell on the phrase, "the finshed work of Christ." At that very hour his mother was in private intercession for him. As he thought upon these words, the Holy Spirit, with mighty power, brought him at once to accept that finished work.

Tracts in great variety and excellence may be had from The American Tract Society, Park Avenue and Fortieth Street, New York City.

By Personal Endeavor

The subtle influence of one personality over another has never been so fully understood and recognized as today. Whatever may be the explanation, it is certainly a fact that one person may, by the direct application of his will, exercise a masterful influence over the will of another, especially when brought into personal contact. This personal influence is often more powerful than sermons, or letters, or tracts. It is a familiar fact that Jesus used personal contact with individuals in a very large proportion of his miracles. His first disciples were won by a direct personal appeal, and in imita-

tion of him, they used the same mighty method. The Holy Spirit dwelling in a Christian is willing to make him wondrously winsome. He is ready to speak through our eyes and our lips, and will bring into action all the distinctive traits of personality possessed by each of us if we but be willing to be used by him.

One bright summer day after some very exhausting work, a gentleman threw himself on the rich blue grass, and, looking up through the overhanging locust trees, rested his eyes on the blue depths beyond. A young man came and sat beside him, and they talked in a natural and friendly way. Said the tired worker, rising on his elbow, "Mr. B., I wish you knew a friend of mine in R. He is so noble and great." "Who is he?" replied the young man. "O, he is so true, so tender, so resourceful, so wonderful. I do wish you knew him." "Well, I'd like to know a man like that. Who is he?" "Why, Mr. B., it is Jesus Christ. Would you not like to have him as your friend?" It was not long before that young man had made friends with Jesus and joined his church. Loose the powers of your personality that they may be used by God to win men to His obedience.

By Intercession

Then there lies an instrument which any Christian may use at any time anywhere. It is the key that unlocks the powerhouse of the Almighty. It is the only known way by which we may obtain the conquering power of the Holy Spirit. It is prayer. It is the wireless way of letting our desires be known to God. Time and again the President of the United States has sat in his office in Washington and by touching a small key has set in motion the machinery of an exposition hundreds of miles away. Prayer releases the energies of God, brings God into action. It is the greatest power entrusted by God to mortal man. By it we lift our fellowmen, dead in trespasses and in sins, into the presence of God and release upon them His creative power. "I have prayed for thee," said Christ to Peter, and Peter was taken

from the slough of despond and made into a rock. When God was about to destroy Israel, Moses assuaged his anger and turned his vengeance into pity by prayer. By it Elijah turned the heavens to brass, and the brass to streams of water. God has given into the hand of the humblest Christian the greatest power in the world, that it may be used to save the souls of men.

WHO MUST WIN SOULS?

The Pastor's First Duty

Surely no argument is needed to prove that the first and highest duty of the minister of the Gospel is to win men's souls to Christ. Under modern conditions he is required to organize and direct his church's activities of every kind. He is responsible for the use of the most effective methods of religious education. He is expected to direct in masterful way the social life of his congregation, and to take his place as a leading citizen. For no consideration should he allow his sense of obligation to win souls to be dulled. Here is the sphere for the exercise of his most convincing logic, of his most persuasive eloquence, of his most original literary gifts, of his most genial social attainments, of all the subtle powers of his personality, of all his prayer-energies. O minister of the Most High, ambassador of Jesus Christ, break loose from all entanglements or engagements, or personal habits, or professional ambitions, or forces of spiritual inertia, that diminish your power with God and with men to save sinful souls. With glowing countenance, and deep emotions, a minister recently told a friend of the gracious revival in his church during which forty-eight persons professed their faith in Jesus Christ. Come, now, come! The harvest is truly ripe. Enter in, O enter in!

The Ruling Elder's Crown of Glory

No office within the gift of men is more laden with spiritual opportunity and privilege than that of the eldership. In a most emphatic and peculiar way, our Lord has taken the elders into partnership

with himself. They derive their authority from him. To them he has committed the government of the church whose redemption he purchased at the price of his own blood. They guard her doctrines against admixture with error, and direct her energies at home and abroad. They regulate the worship of the saints, and determine the methods of spiritual nurture to be used by the church, for their children and youth. Surely, this is high and honorable employment. The expectation of the Redeemer cannot be met in this service without the constant exercise of spiritual power. There can be in the very nature of the case no compromise possible. No men in the whole world stand face to face with stronger guarantees of spiritual effectiveness. But half-hearted service means wholesale disaster.

When a small boy, Prof. J. R. Blake, of Davidson College, a beloved and honored elder and Sunday school superintendent, led me to Jesus' feet. I can now feel the gentle touch of his hand of blessing and can hear his earnest words of instruction and am still receiving, after forty-five years, the rich fruits of his intercession for me. O brother elders, beloved and honored, put forth your spiritual energies in behalf of the unsaved around you. Come into the fellowship of Jesus Christ as a winner of souls.

The Superintendent's Noblest Conquests

And there is our brother, the superintendent of the Sunday school. To what a place of responsibility and privilege has he been elevated. Second only to the pastor in influence, with an enormous weight of spiritual affairs pressing hard on him daily, it is no wonder that he is often sorely perplexed and hesitant. The very rapid growth of the modern Sunday school idea makes an imperious call to him for progress. He dare not stand still in the matter of the organization, equipment, instruction, worship and methods of work lest he lose influence with the teachers and power with pupils. In the very nature of the case, he is sorely tempted to lose sight of the essentially spiritual quality of his service, and give himself up to mere methods of organization and work. Whatever obstacles may be in the way of

advance in other directions, this way is always open —to lead souls to Jesus Christ. From his desk, Sabbath after Sabbath, in the reading of the lesson, in the songs, in his prayers, in his exhortation he may be a winner of souls. Especially does his office open to him the way into the homes of his pupils and into their hearts for personal appeals.

The Teacher's Chief Glory

Surely all teachers have an unexcelled opportunity to win souls, whether their work be done in secular or Sunday schools. There are not a few teachers, especially in boarding schools, who count it the crowning privilege of their lives to be used in leading pupils with whom they must come into daily contact of the most intimate kind to confess Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. The Sunday school teachers feel keenly the heavy present-day pressure to make their work educational, and surely we cannot be content to have it anything less. In multitudes of cases, conscious of their lack of knowledge of the laws and methods of teaching, and often of their limited store of Bible knowledge, they would spend their energy and time in correcting these educational defects. Surely they are to be commended for their effort, for the standard of efficiency cannot be lowered. Of what profit are Bible history, doctrine and literature, missionary biography and methods if pupils are not thereby led to Jesus Christ for salvation and service? Here is a way of working that is always open to them to win souls to Jesus. It is astonishing how little educational equipment and training are needed, although the best is not to be despised. Put the soul's salvation first, not educaiton. "First the kingdom of God and——." For many years a most gifted young woman in one of our largest churches taught a large class of boys. She personally sought their salvation with winsome grace. Rarely did a communion season pass without her bringing one or more of them to be examined for church membership.

Hearts of Parents

Does it not seem that parents would naturally

be used most freely for the salvation of their own children? The fear of using too much moral persuasion deters many from speaking on this vital subject to their own children. This danger is far too much emphasized. There is a paramount duty resting directly on all parents to create in the home the most genuine and invigorating spiritual atmosphere. Family worship has a most positive and powerful influence in this direction. But parents should speak to their children directly with deep yearnings and fervent prayers, seeking to win them to Jesus. Neither time nor pressure of circumstances can ever cause one to forget the time when he knelt by his mother's side as she poured out her very soul to God for her child's salvation.

Why should a further attempt be made to catalogue those who should be winning souls? Pastors? Elders? Superintendents? Teachers? Parents? Yes; all these! It is well to stop and think of the special inducements for them to be winners of souls. After all has been said about them, and about others, the matter comes straight back to you. Do you want to do the one thing that is distinctively Christian? Then win souls. Do you want to stamp out sin from the world? Then win souls. Are you interested in making goodness abound everywhere? Then save souls. Do you desire to be a builder of human welfare, a real constructive force in society? Then bring men to Christ. Do you really long to make men happy? Then acquaint them with Jesus. Do you desire, above all else, to honor the great and good God? Then save souls. Are there not times when, your soul aflame with devotion to Jesus Christ, you really long to show your allegiance to him? Then at once lay hold upon men, upon women, upon children, and with irresistible love compel them to surrender to him.

God the Father awaits to bless you. God the Son yearns for your fellowship in the travail of his soul. God the Holy Spirit stands ready to clothe you with power. Do not delay.

Enter now into the greatest privilege in the world. YOU! YOU! YOU!

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